



# REOPENING GUIDANCE FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

The following information is guidance for faith-based organizations to empower safe practices and prevent the spread of COVID-19 within their organization and their faith community. The information provided is consistent with current CDC recommendations at this time.

## Recommendations Before Reopening

- Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation
  - Conduct routine HVAC maintenance and change air filters
  - Cleaning staff should [clean and disinfect](#) all areas including offices, bathrooms, and common areas, focusing especially on frequently touched surfaces
    - Clean dirty surfaces with soap and water
    - Next, disinfect surfaces using [products that meet EPA's criteria for use against SARS-Cov-2](#), the virus that causes COVID-19, and that are appropriate for the surface
    - Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products for concentration, application method, contact time, and required personal protective equipment (PPE)
  - Operations can begin after completing the cleaning and disinfection procedures
- Maintain an adequate supply of soap and hand sanitizer
  - Encourage safe alternative greetings instead of hugs and handshaking
  - Remind everyone to use tissues or the crook of their elbow to cover their mouths when coughing or sneezing
  - Ensure there are enough staff or volunteers to sanitize all areas after each use
  - Regularly [clean and disinfect](#) frequently touched surfaces
  - Follow [CDC guidance](#) on how to disinfect your building or facility if someone ill has been on the premises
  - Continue to provide spiritual and emotional support and resources for your congregation
  - Recommend that attendees at higher risk of serious illness for COVID-19 take extra precaution
  - All employees and worshippers should stay home if they feel sick
  - Establish a method for notifying health officials and participants if someone who attended a gathering becomes ill
  - Provide information to all members on how to get tested for COVID-19 ([covcheck.hctx.net](http://covcheck.hctx.net))

## Help Protect Faith Leaders and the Congregation

- Encourage participants, especially those who have a higher risk for serious illness, to engage in virtual worship and faith services
- Encourage the use of cloth face coverings following [CDC guidelines](#)
- Visibly post signage regarding cloth coverings, handwashing, and other ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19
  - Find downloadable signage at <http://www.hcphtx.org/Resources/2019-Novel-Coronavirus>

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## Modifying Gatherings

- If possible, offer alternative options such as virtual or drive-in services
- If virtual services are not possible, consider hosting outdoor gatherings
- Consider limiting all in-person gatherings to allow for adequate social distance ([6ft distance](#))
- Limit the use of frequently shared objects like books or pamphlets. Consider sharing these items electronically
- Modify practices that call for passing objects such as baskets or collection plates. Consider using a stationary location instead
- Avoid serving buffet or family-style meals. Serve any meals individually packaged
- Encourage other groups or programs using the space to follow the same guidelines

## Planning for Absenteeism

- Determine how you will operate with a reduced staff if employees cannot work due to illness, staying home to care for sick family members and those who must stay home to watch their children
- Prepare to institute flexible workplace and leave policies
- Cross-train employees to perform essential functions, so the workplace can operate even if key employees are absent

## Free COVID-19 Testing is Available for Everyone

We encourage everyone to get free testing at a testing site. The updated online self-assessment tool is confidential and serves the public in the Greater Houston area. To register for testing, visit <http://covidcheck.hctx.net/>. For those who do have access to the online tool, call **832-927-7575** to get scheduled for testing. Free testing is available regardless of citizenship status and for those who are uninsured.

Faith leaders and employees should **not** return to work if they are sick. If an employee has a sick family member they live with or has been near an ill person, they should notify their employer immediately.

Please go to [www.hcphtx.org](http://www.hcphtx.org) for any additional information on how to keep yourself or employees safe during this pandemic.

\*People at higher risk for severe illness are those who are 65 or older, especially those with chronic lung disease; moderate to severe asthma; chronic heart disease; severe obesity; diabetes; chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis; liver disease; or weakened immune system.

## Additional Information is Available From the CDC

[Checklist for community and faith leaders](#)  
[Community and faith leaders](#)  
[How to take care of yourself at home](#)  
[COVID-19 symptoms](#)  
[Additional guidance documents and printables](#)

## From the Office of the Governor

[Texans helping Texans: The Governor's report to open Texas](#)  
[Latest news from the office of the Governor](#)

## From the Attorney General

[Guidance for houses of worship](#)

## From the US Department of Health and Human Services

[Preventative practices](#)  
[Mental health and coping](#)

## From the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS)

[Case counts](#)  
[Texas Health Trace](#)

## To Access Testing

Visit [covcheck.hctx.net](http://covcheck.hctx.net)  
Call Ask My Nurse line 713.634.1110

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## CHECKLIST FOR MINIMUM RECOMMENDATIONS

### Health Protocols for Serving Your Attendees

- ☐ Strongly encourage people at a higher risk for serious illness to watch or participate in the service remotely
- ☐ Offer a service or designate an area inside the facility reserved for the higher risk attendees only
- ☐ Ensure proper spacing between attendees
- ☐ Alternate rows between customers (every other row left empty)

### Health Protocols for Your Facilities

- ☐ Regularly and frequently clean and disinfect any regularly touched surfaces, such as doorknobs, tables, chairs, and restrooms
- ☐ Disinfect seats between services
- ☐ Disinfect any items that come into contact with attendees
- ☐ Make hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, soap and water, or similar disinfectant readily available

### Health Protocols for Your Employees and Volunteers

- ☐ Train all employees and volunteers on appropriate cleaning and disinfection, hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette
- ☐ Have employees or volunteers wash or sanitize their hands upon entering
- ☐ Have employees or volunteers maintain at least 6 ft separation from other individuals. If such distancing is not feasible, then other measures including face covering, hand hygiene, cough etiquette, cleanliness, and sanitation should be rigorously practiced
- ☐ Consistent with the actions taken by many churches, congregations, and places of worship across the state, consider having employees, volunteers, and attendees wear cloth face coverings (the nose and mouth). If available, they should consider wearing non-medical grade face masks

- ☐ Keep at least two empty seats (or 6 ft separation) between parties in any row, except as follows:
  - Two or more members of the same household can sit adjacent to one another, with two seats (or 6 ft separation) empty on either side
  - Two individuals who are not members of the same household but who are attending together can sit adjacent to one another, with two seats (or 6 ft separation) empty on either side
- ☐ Place readily visible signage to remind everyone of best hygiene practices
- ☐ If a church or place of worship provides meals for employees, volunteers, or attendees, they are recommended to have the meals individually packed for each employee, volunteer, or attendee
- ☐ Maintain rigorous sanitation practices like disinfection, handwashing, and cleanliness when preparing or serving anything edible
- ☐ Screen employees and volunteers before coming into the church, congregation, or place of worship:
  - ☐ Send home any employee or volunteer who has any of the following new or worsening signs or symptoms of possible COVID-19
    - Cough
    - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
    - Chills
    - Repeated shaking with chills
    - Muscle pain
    - Headache
    - Sore throat
    - Loss of taste or smell
    - Diarrhea
    - Feeling feverish or measured temperature greater than > 100.4°F
    - Known close contact with a person who is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19

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- Do not allow employees or volunteers with new or worsening signs or symptoms listed above to return to work until:
  - If the employee or volunteer is diagnosed with COVID-19, they may return to work when all three of the following criteria are met:
    - At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared
    - At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since recovery (having no fever without the use of fever-reducing medications)
    - The individual has improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath)
  - If the employee or volunteer has COVID-19 symptoms and does not get tested or evaluated by a medical professional, the individual is assumed to have COVID-19. The individual may not return to work until the individual has completed the same three-step criteria listed above
- If the employee or volunteer has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and wants to return to work before completing the above self-isolation period, the individual **must obtain a medical professional's note clearing the individual to return to work based on an alternative diagnosis.**
- Do not allow an employee or volunteer with known close contact to a person who is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19 to return to work until the end of the 14 days self-quarantine period from the last date of exposure (with an exception granted for healthcare workers and critical infrastructure workers)

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